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THE HOLY PRIEST

OR

NECESSITY AND MEANS

Of acquiring and perfecting Sacerdotal Sanctity.

BY

L'ABBÉ H. DUBOIS.

HONORARY CANON,

SUPERIOR OF THE GREAT SEMINARY OF COUTANCES.

AUTHOR OF

“La Pratique du Zèle Ecclésiastique et de la Pratique du
Christianisme à l'usage des gens du monde.”

APPROUVÉ PAR MGR. DANIEL, EVÊQUE DE COUTANCES.

Translated from the French.

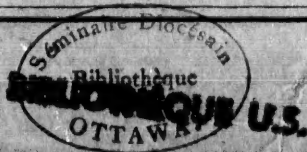
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Emprimatur.

† EDWARD CHARLES,

Archbishop of Montreal

APPROBATION OF THE FRENCH EDITION

BY

MONSEIGNEUR JACQUES LOUIS DANIEL,

BISHOP OF COUTANCES.

TO MONSIEUR L'ABBÉ H. DUBOIS,

Chanoine Honoraire,

Ancien Supérieur du Grand Séminaire de Coutances.

MONSIEUR L'ABBÉ :

I have read "*Le Saint Prêtre*," with deep interest. This excellent book completes your "*Pratique du zèle Ecclesiastique*," which you published last year.

Your exhortations and counsels are most instructive, judicious and edifying.

Your book, dictated by good sense, reason and piety, will give new life and strength to the ecclesiastical spirit and all the sacerdotal virtues required in the Clergy. I Bless God and thank you for it.

Accept, monsieur l'Abbé, the assurance of my sincere affection and entire devotion.

† JACQUES LOUIS,

Bishop of Coutances.



AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION.

Encouraged by the hearty welcome given to our *Pratique du zèle Ecclésiastique* (*Zeal in the Ministry*), by the bishops and clergy at large, we venture to offer them the *Saint Prêtre*, which in our opinion is not less important, and without which the former is not complete.

These two works are evidently closely allied. In the *Pratique du zèle Ecclésiastique*, we have endeavored to stimulate the Priest's zeal to labor for the salvation of souls and save the greatest number possible; and while pointing out the ways and means to that end, we have mentioned his own sanctity as one of the necessary factors to insure success. Satisfied with this simple allusion, we have confined ourself to the subject matter limited by the plan of our work.

In the present work, we propose to establish the necessity of sacerdotal sanctity and point out the means whereby to acquire it. Hence, while this work has the priest's own sanctification for its primary object, the other proposes to secure the sanctification of the faithful. Hence, what is secondary in the one becomes primary in the other and vice versa; which difference however proves their mutual dependence. For if the priest *ex officio* is bound to study the ways and means by which to save souls, his obligations to himself are not less imperative when there is question of his own sanctification.

These reflections will perhaps leave us exposed to a merited reproach which we are resigned to accept. It may be asked:—Why did you not first publish the *Holy Priest*, since it is in order, that the priest ought to have sanctified himself before laboring to sanctify others? According to the example of his divine Saviour, he ought to have practiced what he teaches.

We admit the truth of those remarks, and had God inspired us with the thought of the *Holy Priest* prior to that of *Zeal in the Ministry*, it should certainly have been our first work; but as the case now stands the one has stolen the birth-right of the other.

We shall now proceed to give a brief outline of the plan and scope of the present work which contains three general divisions.

In the first division, we propose to show the necessity of sacerdotal sanctity in the priest; and relative to this sanctity, we shall examine the life he has led since his departure from the seminary, what that life is at present, and what it ought to be in future.

In the other two divisions we discuss the means whereby to acquire that sanctity. The first and most potent means consists in the practice of virtue, which we treat in *extenso* and in a practical manner.

Finally, we point out as a secondary means, all the ordinary duties of his life, his spiritual and ministerial duties, meditation, holy mass, the divine office, administration of the sacraments etc., devoting a chapter to each one of them.

Such is the scope and plan of this book, in which we have embodied a vast number of counsels and rules

which we believe well calculated to lead our worthy colleagues to the acquisition of that sanctity which their sublime profession demands.

It will be found that all questions treated in this work are handled with the same moderation as that which prevails in our *Zeal in the Ministry*. We have said nothing, which, in the light of truth, will not meet the approbation of every impartial reader.

Apart from the first two chapters on the necessity of sacerdotal sanctity, which constitute the dogmatical part of our work, we have endeavored to render it similar to our first production in spirit and style, so that it might be readily perceived that it is the continuation and completion of the former. It was our duty to do so, since God permitted that our *Zeal in the Ministry* proved to be so acceptable to our venerable brethren for whom it was prepared.

Would that the present production may meet with the same success! We have labored at it with the same zeal. God grant that it may meet with the same favor; that it may be useful in extending the glory of the divine Master, by securing the salvation of souls in general and the sanctification of our venerable colleagues.

We recommend this new work not only to priests, but also to seminarians in *sacred orders*, who, God willing, will derive some benefit from its perusal.

THE HOLY PRIEST.

PART FIRST.

NECESSITY OF SACERDOTAL SANCTITY.

Can we say that we have possessed it in the past? —Do we possess it at the present time? —What are our intentions relative to it henceforward?

When we propose to attain an end which to us is of vital importance, we ought to be thoroughly convinced that it is absolutely necessary for us to secure it. This is a fundamental principle that cannot be denied. But before pointing out in detail the means which the priest should use to acquire the sanctity that God requires of him, we shall first dwell on the indispensable obligation he is under of possessing it.

Hence, we offer our readers three grave considerations, in the light of which we desire this little treatise to be read.

1st. The priest can never attain to a degree of sanctity equal to the sublimity of his sacred office.

2nd. A vast number of priests are far from being as holy as they ought to be.

3rd. The greater the priest's sanctity is, the greater will be the glory he will give to God, the greater will be the number of souls he will save, and the greater will be his assurance of his own eternal salvation.

These considerations will guard us against a fatal illusion, unfortunately too prevalent, and by which we are easily led to believe that we may rest satisfied with that degree of sanctity which will rigorously suffice to save us from eternal reprobation. How many millions of souls are now in heaven who would be in hell, if a Francis Xavier, a Vincent Ferrier, and many others had made this principle the basis of their sanctity ?

CHAPTER I.

SPECIAL NECESSITY OF SANCTITY IN THE PRIEST.

PROOFS OF THIS NECESSITY.

WE need no stronger proof of the necessity of sacerdotal sanctity in the priest than that furnished by the Epistles of St. Paul to Timothy and Titus. The priest who reads these epistles in a spirit of faith must necessarily say to himself, with a conviction founded on unquestionable certainty : " Since I am a priest, I ought to be a holy priest." Who is it that would not be struck by the persistently repeated recommendations made by the Holy Ghost in those Epistles, to engage us to lead a holy life ? There is not a single phrase—not a single word, so to speak—that does not contain a rule of life, and a rule of life that is by no means given us in common with the simple faithful ; but a rule meant specially for us, since, for the most part, it relates to us only.

"Be thou an example of the faithful, in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in chastity. Till I come, attend unto reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine. Neglect not the grace that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with imposition of the hands of the priesthood. Meditate upon these things, be wholly in these things, that thy profiting may be manifest to all. Take heed to thyself, and to doctrine: be earnest in them. For in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.—Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world: and certainly we can carry nothing out. But having food, and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content.—For the desire of money is the root of all evil.—But thou, O man of God, fly these things: and pursue justice, godliness, faith, charity, patience, mildness.—Labour as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.—No man, being a soldier to God, entangleth himself with secular businesses.—Carefully study to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.—But shun profane and vain babblings.—But be thou vigilant, labour in all things, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil thy ministry. Be sober.—Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life whereunto thou art called."

The pious and attentive perusal of these immortal epistles ought to suffice to engage us to labor with a generous determination to attain to that degree of sanctity which they positively require in us. To comment on them would be only dwarfing the force of their divine energy; still it may not be amiss to offer a few grave and solid considerations furnished by the most reliable authority. Relative to sanctity in general let it suffice here to lay down a few fundamental principles which are universally admitted. It is

obligatory for all to acquire sanctity. God gives everyone sufficient grace to acquire it. The Kingdom of Heaven is the home of the saints; nothing defiled can enter therein. Sanctity has degrees more or less eminent. It is not necessary to possess the most perfect degree of sanctity in order to gain Heaven.

The last two are the most frequently abused by such as settle quietly down into a permanent state of imperfection.

When a man is devoid of an ardent love for God, a great zeal for the sanctification of his own soul, a lively horror for venial sin—not being firmly determined to correct his imperfections, being satisfied with avoiding mortal sin—he shuns the company of the fervent to frequent those who are tepid and negligent in God's service.

If the simple faithful acted in this way it would indeed be a great evil; because our Divine Lord addressed the following words to all without exception: "Be ye holy as I am holy." "This is the will of God, your sanctification." "Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." The disorder in question would be much less revolting in the people than in those whose life is professionally holy, such as that of religious and especially of priests.

We will be enabled to avoid this rock upon which so many have been wrecked, by keeping constantly before the mind's eye the fact that, while sanctity possesses different degrees, some are bound by their station in life to possess it in a more perfect degree than others, as our Blessed Saviour very clearly intimates by these words: "Much will be required of him to whom much was given."

Is it not quite evident, by reason of the intimate relations we hold with God, through the exercise of the duties of a sacred ministry from which angels are excluded, a ministry which charges us with the sanctification of souls and secures to us graces of predilection in a profusion known to God alone—is it not evident, I say, that our sanctity ought to be greater than that of the simple faithful who have never received such signal favors?

It is in virtue of this principle, so reasonable and just, that the angels of the highest choir in Heaven are holier than those of an inferior choir. It is in virtue of this principle that St. John the Baptist, the prophet and precursor of Jesus, was proclaimed by the Saviour to be the holiest among the children of men. Finally, it is in virtue of this principle that Mary, through her divine maternity, is the holiest, the most perfect, and the most favored in grace, merit and glory, of all created beings. This is why her conception was immaculate, her life most holy, her death miraculous, and as long as God will be God, the angels and saints shall receive her as their august Queen.

According to this same principle, sanctity in a super-eminent degree should be the priest's glorious appendage. For, since that sanctity is measured by the intimate relation which the dignity with which he is invested establishes between himself and God, and since that relation is of such a nature as to identify him with our eternal Priest, Jesus Christ, and merit for him the title of an "*Alter Christus*," great ought to be the sanctity he should possess. If that sanctity should be proportioned to the dignity conferred upon him on the day of his ordination, who can comprehend it! The human mind becomes bewildered in trying

to grasp it. "*Grandis sacerdotum dignitas!*" exclaims St. Jerome. We must be satisfied with admiring it; to attempt to explain it would be dwarfing the true notion of it.

Consider the priest in the exercise of the simplest function of his sacred ministry, examine this act with the eye of faith and you will feel your admiration aroused by its excellence. It cannot be otherwise; for the priest in the exercise of his sacred duties has nothing in common with the vile interests of earth. He soars above them, and from the sublime elevation of the holy priesthood to which the hand of God has raised him they are forever debarred. Constantly in immediate relation with God, whose holy will he carries out relative to souls, the true minister of Jesus Christ, whose work he carries on, may truly say with St. Paul, in virtue of the sublime dignity conferred on him: "And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me." Man disappeared the moment I became a priest; from that time I live not, but Christ liveth in me. As if he would say, Jesus absorbs me, Jesus metamorphoses me; I have so often received Him in Holy Communion that He replaces my whole being. I am His eye, His arm, His hand, His foot, His flesh, His soul and His heart. "I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me.

Behold this priest with the eye of faith while discharging his sacred duties, and you will readily understand that there is no exaggeration in all that has been said. Whose place does the priest hold, when by his breathings, his blessings and exorcisms he delivers the soul of the neophyte from the slavery of Satan at the baptismal font, where, by the regenerating waters of holy baptism, he makes it the living temple of the Holy Ghost? Is it not Jesus who

blesse by his hand, sanctifies by his breathings and finally baptizes by his sacred ministry? *Hic est qui baptizat in spiritu sancto.* St. John the Baptist says: "The one upon whom you shall see the dove descending is the one who baptizes." "Peter may baptize," says St. Augustine; "he is authorized to do so, but let him remember that it is Jesus who baptizes through his agency. Paul may baptize, but let him know that it is Jesus who baptizes by his ministry."

And when that child comes to the age of reason, when his intelligence is emancipated from the cloud of infancy, and asks for other spiritual food; in whose name and by whose authority will the priest break the bread of life to him? Whose doctrine shall he plant in his heart? The word of life which his lips pronounce, is it his own or the Word of God? When that same child merges into manhood and comes with the assembled faithful to receive the priest's instruction as the expression of God's will in his regard, whose place does the priest hold? In whose name does he preach the Divine Word? Of whose voice is he the mouth-piece, if not of Him who said? Go and reproach my people with their sins. Preach the Word in season and out of season. Go preach the Gospel to all nations. But woe to him if instead of preaching God he preaches for selfish interests! Woe to him if for such motives he betrays his sacred trust and makes a sacrilegious use of the Divine Word! which St. Augustine compares to the profanation committed by the unworthy receiver of the holy eucharist: inasmuch as Jesus would have the Divine Word held in the same esteem as His sacred body and blood! *Non minus reus erit, qui verbum Dei perperam audierit, quam qui corpus Christi in terram cadere sua negligentia præsumpserit. Non minus est verbum Dei quam corpus Christi.* And when by that Divine Word a Magdalen has been moved

to repentance, an arrogant Saul changed into a vessel of election, an Augustine converted, whose place will the priest hold when those trophies of Divine grace shall come, and bathed in tears cast themselves down at his feet to obtain by his authority the pardon of their sins?

Behold this man seated in the confessional, exchanging a few words with penitents on their knees beside him, raising his hand from time to time over them, and by three words which his lips pronounce, absolves them from their sins, closes hell and opens heaven, and at each instant transforms sinners into saints!

Verily is it man or God who sits upon this tribunal of mercy? Priests of Jesus Christ, what is it that we do in this sacred tribunal? It is true that we pronounce a certain formula of words, but have those whom we pardoned offended us personally? By no means; and nevertheless is it not of the person offended that pardon must be asked and obtained? Why then do those repenting sinners come to us for pardon? They have offended God, and they by their tears sue for pardon from a sinful man like themselves. O mystery of incomprehensible greatness on the part of man and merciful condescension on the part of God!

Yes, priest of the living God, holding the place of Jesus Christ, exercising His ministry, acting in His name and by virtue of the Divine power with which He has invested you, you are authorized to say to each sinner with sovereign authority, *Ego te absolvo!* And so true is it that it is God who acts through you and by you, that were a judge of this world to cite you before his tribunal to extort from you the secrets confided to you by God's people, your unqualified reply

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should be: I know nothing of the things you ask me. And why? Because to you, not as man, but as God's representative, the people have confided the secrets of their hearts. Hence, I repeat it, you hold God's place in the discharge of your sacred duties, you are His mouthpiece to pronounce His decrees. How sublime and incomprehensible the dignity and power invested in you! a power which provoked the Jews to ask with indignation, "Who but God can forgive sins?"

Let the priest ascend the altar now, not to replace Jesus Christ, but to produce Him. Words fail to give expression to the greatness of the act, "*Deficient Verba.*" If by the eye of faith we contemplate the wonders that surround us, we cannot fail to adore with fear and trembling the eternal God, whom, by the power of a few words, the priest brings down from Heaven every morning in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Behold the Catholic priest at the altar!!! O God! what a spectacle! The God of Heaven obeys the voice of man when he says, as if Jesus Christ Himself said: *Hoc est enim corpus meum.* A man by pronouncing those five words operates the miracle of transubstantiation, immolates the Son of God upon the stone of Sacrifice, holds the Court of Heaven in ecstasy, brings down torrents of grace upon earth, arrests the thunderbolts of God's vengeance from falling upon thousands of sinners, liberates the souls in Purgatory; a man performs and renews these prodigies every day on which he celebrates holy Mass. And Jesus Christ never fails to obey the authority of His word. Verily I ask is this being a man? Does he belong to the human family? Do the angels, illumined by the light of glory, on beholding the dignity with which hu-

manity is honored, see in the priest only an ordinary man, the daily sacrificer of the God whom they adore?

Instead of wasting our energies in admiring this incomprehensible prodigy, let us put our hand on our heart, and ask ourselves, if this most exalted dignity does not require more than ordinary sanctity in those whose privilege it is to possess it? Let us ask ourselves, if the priest thus favored is really what he ought to be when he descends—I will not say to the level of sinners—the thought makes us shudder—but to an inferior degree of christian virtue? Can such a priest consider, without trouble and confusion, multitudes of the pious faithful his superiors in sanctity and christian perfection? Does he revere and respect in himself his sacred character as the faithful revere and respect it? They consider him as the shadow of God. Those pious souls instructed in the school of the Holy Ghost, measure his sanctity as it ought to be measured, namely: by the sublimity of his sacred duties and the divinity of the holy priesthood.

In the sacred sanctuary of our conscience, we endorse by anticipation the answers to those questions.

The priest ascends the altar every day to immolate the divine victim and receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Who will dare assert that this act does not require in him who performs it an inviolable sanctity?

He enters the tribunal of penance invested with power to raise the sinner from the grave of sin and reconcile him to God, to give spiritual energy to the tepid Christian, to lead the just in the ways of perfection, to console, enlighten and direct thousands of souls in the way of salvation. Is this the work of a

priest devoid of piety? Is it not rather the work of a saint?

He ascends the pulpit to preach the word of God to the multitude, to sound the divine trumpet, to explain the Gospel, and render its austere doctrine acceptable to his hearers, to preach the necessity of practicing virtue and avoiding sin. Not being equal himself to what he would have others be, would he be discharging his duty as a faithful apostle, as a good and faithful servant? Can we suppose that God would be satisfied with his service?

He is sent as the representative of Jesus Christ to the people, to be His minister and co-laborer, to exercise His sacred ministry, going like Him in search of sinners, consoling the afflicted, helping the poor, giving his life and labors for the salvation of all, becoming *all to all that he might lead all to God*. Can all this be done with a heart filled with cold indifference, a soul possessed of languid piety and ordinary sanctity?

The necessity of sanctity in the priest is self-evident; this evidence reposes on principles so solid and palpable that a man, who is ever so little versed in Christian perfection, can perceive at a glance why the priest is specially obliged to be holy. Take the untutored savage of the forest who has only the figure of man; take him from the forest where he dwells with wild beasts; instruct him in the truths of our holy religion sufficiently to give him an exact idea of the principle dogmas of Christianity; tell him for instance that 1,800 years ago men were so corrupt and degraded that they were unable to satisfy divine justice; that the eternal Son of God became man to save them; that He was born in a stable; that He earned His bread by the sweat of His brow; that He suffered a long and cruel

passion. Tell him that on the eve of His passion and death He gave His power and authority to a few men who were like all other men; He had chosen them to be His successors, His ministers, in a word, to be *other Christs* like Himself. He addressed to them these wonderful words: "As my Father has sent me I also send you; Go, preach, baptize, immolate me upon the altar; wash away sins; close the gates of Hell; open those of Heaven; I leave you the keys of both places; do what you have seen me do for the salvation of souls; be the depositories of my power; still more, communicate it to others; perpetuate the priesthood which I have established so that there shall be priests upon earth till I come to judge the living and the dead; priests such as I have been during my mortal life; zealous teachers of the purest moral, Saviours of souls, wresting them from the snares of Satan, powerful mediators between human perversity and divine sanctity." Say this and this only to the poor savage, and then ask him what man of all men ought to be the holiest, the most perfect, and the most virtuous? and doubt not that he will hesitate for a moment in saying that that man is the priest.

It is not necessary to go to the Indian for an answer to our question; we shall find it in the very heart of our holy religion. During the public life of our Blessed Redeemer He was followed by multitudes of people who heard Him, questioned Him, and admired Him; and on witnessing His miracles lauded the sanctity of His doctrine, and loudly proclaimed His divinity. He loved them most tenderly, as may be seen from the works of mercy which he operated every day in their favor. However, although all without exception were dear and very dear to Him; still He had a few intimate, privileged friends whom He honored with His confidence, and destined to be His glo-

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Now we ask: Who at that time should have had the greatest love for Jesus? Of whom had He a right to exact the greatest devotedness, perfection and zeal? Is it not evident that it was from His Apostles and Disciples? Is it not because of our profound conviction of this truth that we have conceived so much horror for the crime of Judas and the denial of Peter? We detest, indeed, the deicide of the Jews, but we detest a hundred times more the abominable treason of the perfidious Iscariot. The great disparity between his title of Apostle and that of traitor, merited by his crime, fills the heart with indignation. The thought so just and true, that his heart should have burned with love instead of venom for Jesus, that he should have been as holy as he proved to be infamous, so far absorbs the mind that we know not how to give expression to the horror which his act evokes. As an Apostle, he ought to have loved Jesus most ardently, and he delivered Him into the hands of His murderers; as an Apostle, he ought to have labored for the salvation of souls, and he plunged his own soul into hell; as an Apostle, he ought to have edified the world, and he became its scandal and execration.

This line of conduct so shocking and revolting begets in the christian soul a feeling of anguish which she is unable to control. But whence does this irresistible sentiment arise, if not from that rigorous principle of justice which points out, that the closer our union is with God the greater ought to be our fidelity to serve Him?

The truths, already adduced to prove the necessity of sanctity in the priest, are energetically corroborated

by our divine Saviour in these words "*Cui multum datum est, multum quaeretur ab eo.*" And who receives more grace than the priest? Who can compute the torrents of benedictions and heavenly favors heaped upon him the day of his ordination, if he is duly disposed?

God never refuses to bless a good and duly authorized vocation to any profession whatever, provided the subject be duly disposed; and the graces that God will mete out to him will be proportioned to the importance of the state of life which he has embraced, that he may be enabled to discharge in a worthy manner all the duties thereof.

According to this principle, which no one will gainsay, how many and how great must be the graces granted the young priest, who, feeble and inexperienced, scales the mountain of the Lord, honored with his confidence and the execution of his greatest designs, the sacrificer of his divine Son, a constant mediator between heaven and earth, obliged by his office to labor ardently, not only for his own salvation, but also for that of those confided to his care! Will he not receive in their fullest plenitude the graces that he needs both for himself and for his brethren, provided he place no obstacle in the way?

Who can duly realize or comprehend the magnificence of the spiritual gifts with which the soul of this young man is adorned at that moment, when it can be truly said of him:—*Tu es sacerdos in æternum?* There transpires at that moment ineffable mysteries which God alone knows, but which are often revealed in the young priest, first by a holy dread, then by sighs and tears, and finally by eminent acts of virtue and sanctity. Yes, when he is truly called, when he

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faithfully corresponds to his vocation, when he takes God for his portion and renounces forever the vain pleasures of the world, the blood of Jesus Christ, which he drinks every day, will fill his soul with torrents of divine grace, lighting up in him that lively active faith which operates prodigies. Those virtues which edify and attract, that charity which wins the affections of all, those transports of zeal which touch the hearts of the most obdurate sinners! Behold some of the fruits of those divine graces, when they fall into a sacerdotal heart well disposed to receive them!

And for those graces so precious and so numerous, graces reserved for the priest only, will he not have to render a strict account to God who gave them for a very marked purpose, namely: for his own sanctification and the sanctification of those committed to his care? And will God suffer those graces of predilection to remain sterile—graces, each one of which is the price of the blood of His divine Son? Will God dispense him from acquiring that sanctity which his sacerdotal character calls for, and accept an ordinary sanctity common with the simple faithful, in return for his great and glorious gifts? No; assuredly that cannot be; for that would be introducing an order which implies the negation of the sovereign justice of Him who has said: "*Cui multum datum est, multum quaeretur ab eo.*"

But even if God did not make the acquisition of this sanctity obligatory in the spiritual interest of the priest himself, and even if the priest did not suffer any risk thereby, it is absolutely certain that he is bound to acquire it, in order to discharge the essential obligation that he has contracted on becoming a priest, namely: to labor incessantly for the salvation of souls.

The priest is a saviour of souls; behold his title ! All his thoughts, words and actions ought to be engaged in procuring God's honor and glory, and the salvation of souls; behold the nature of his obligations, the duties of his profession; behold the fundamental point upon which will be based that interrogatory to which he must answer, when standing at the feet of the Sovereign Judge, from whose lips he will hear those formidable words: "*Redde rationem vocationis tue.*"

It is established beyond all doubt, that the priest is rigorously obliged to labor for the salvation of souls; but how shall he be able to fulfil this obligation if he is not a holy priest? If he is lax and tepid in the work of his own salvation, what zeal can he have for that of others? what will engage him to go in search of the lost sheep, and, like the Good Shepherd, bring him on his own shoulders back to the fold? If his own piety has grown cold, how can he impart any fervor to that of the faithful? If he recoils before trivial difficulties in the work of his own salvation, how can he make any sacrifice for that of his brethren? The saints never fail to draw whole multitudes after them in the way of salvation; why? because they are saints themselves and are able of their abundance to share with others. But for the priest who is devoid of sanctity, what can he give? nothing, save of the abundance of his spiritual poverty.

The high esteem in which sacerdotal sanctity is held by worldings who cannot suffer its absence in the priest, make it an imperative duty for him to be up to the standard of his vocation. Those men, while leading scandalous lives, submerged in the sink of iniquity, strangers to every act of religion, behold the saint in the priest. To their mind the one cannot be separated from the other; and they can conceive no other idea

of a priest devoid of sanctity than a horrible monstrosity. Hence, all his efforts to reclaim them to God will remain sterile and fruitless, unless his sanctity be up to the standard of his sacerdotal character. Otherwise they will treat him with such disdain and contempt as hypocrisy usually meets with.

The holy priest is respected and revered by the most dissolute. The libertine who has no place in his heart for virtue, and no word to say in its favor, will not fail to give expression to his feelings of gratitude and praise for the holy priest. The most envenomed tongue lauds his virtues, his mildness, modesty, simplicity and disinterestedness, his life of retreat and study. His virtuous life conciliates the esteem of all. The good and evil alike will say : Behold a true priest ! behold a holy priest ! one who realizes the sublimity and perfection of his divine ministry !

CHAPTER II.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED : OTHER PROOFS OF THE NECESSITY OF SACERDOTAL SANCTITY.

In presence of the preceding grave and numerous considerations, need we be surprised to see the highest authority insist most energetically on the necessity of sacerdotal sanctity ? If the Old Testament is replete with passages insisting on the highest order of sanctity for its priesthood, what shall we say of the perfection that the priesthood of Jesus Christ demands. —a priesthood of which the former is but the figure?

The Holy Ghost, speaking by the mouth of the apostle of the Gentiles, says;—Since the priest is the dispenser of God's gifts, his life should be irreproachable. Hence, he recommends that priests must not be subject to pride, anger, sensuality, or avarice; on the contrary, they must be mild, affable, sober, just and holy. He obliges the priest to edify the faithful by word and example. He repeats, in terms still more energetic;—Man of God! shun what God detests; and practice justice, piety, faith, charity, patience, mildness.

Let us not deceive ourselves by supposing that after all he gives us nothing more here than divine counsels; this is a fatal illusion. These are not the words of the apostle exhorting us. They are the words of the Divine Master commanding us: "I charge thee before God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who gave testimony under Pontius Pilate, a good confession, that thou keep the commandment without spot, blameless, unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." When the Holy Ghost addresses us in terms like these, how can we venture to presume that we are priests according to God's heart, if we serve Him with tepidity and indifference?

Should we consult the Fathers and Doctors of the Church on the necessity of sacerdotal sanctity, we shall find them to be its strongest and most energetic exponents. Volumes would not contain all that they have said in its favor; and to select the best of their sayings on the subject is a most difficult task, since they were at all times equally eloquent when they spoke or wrote on it.

St. Ambrose calls it a God-like profession—"*Deifica professio*." He adds that it is infinitely superior to all

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the greatness of this world—" *Nihil excellentius in hoc seculo.*" He holds it superior not only to the rank of kings, but also to that of angels—" *Praetulit vos sacerdotes regibus et imperatoribus, praetulit vos angelis.*"

St. Gregory and St. Thomas affirm that the angels venerate the holy priesthood—" *Sacerdotium ipsi quoque angeli venerantur.*" St. Ligori remarks that all the angels of heaven united together could not absolve the sinner from one single sin.

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St. Augustine, contemplating the dignity of the priest at the altar, exclaims—" *O venerabilis sanctitudo manuum! O felix exercitium! Qui creavit me sine me, ipse creavit se mediante me.*"

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Pope Innocent III., considering the immense powers of the priest, says: " *Licet beatissima virgo excellentior fuit Apostolis, non tamen illi, sed istis Dominus claves regni caelorum commisit.*" And St. Bernardine, so renowned for his tender piety toward the mother of God, says: " *Virgo benedicta, excusa me, quia non loquor contra te, sacerdotium praetulit super te.*"

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While our Fathers in the faith dwell in glowing terms on the greatness of our august ministry, they point out in the same breath the necessity of sanctity in the priest, and a sanctity that is pre-eminently perfect.

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"Yes," says St. Ambrose, "the sanctity of the priest ought to be far superior to that of the simple faithful; in point of sanctity the priest should have nothing in common with the multitude." " *Nihil in sacerdote commune cum multitudine. Vita sacerdotis praeponderare debet, sicut praeponderat gratia.*"

St. Chrysostom, after having placed the priest above the whole court of celestial spirits, adds these memorable words which we should constantly meditate: "*Nonne accedentem ad altare sacerdotem, sic purum esse oportet ac si in ipsis cælis collocatus, inter cœlestes illas virtutes medius staret? Quæro ex te, quorum illum (sacerdotem) in ordine collocabimus? quantam vero integritatem ab eo exigemus? quantam religionem? Considera enim, quales manus hæc administrantis esse oporteat, qualem linguam quæ verba illa effundat! quo solari radio non puriorem esse oportet manum carnem Christi dividendam? linguam quæ tremendo nimis sanguine rubescit?*" In another place he says: "*Sacerdos debet habere vitam immaculatam, ut omnes in illum, veluti in aliquod exemplar excellens, intueantur. Idcirco nos elegit Deus ut simus quasi luminaria et magistri cœterorum, ac velut angeli versemur in terris.*"

What share can tepidity have in the life of the priest who meditates the above passage and directs his actions according to its spirit?

St. Augustine positively declares that every one who becomes a priest pledges himself thereby to lead a holy life: "*Clericus duo professus est: sanctitatem et clericatum.*"

St. Gregory has the following passage in his pastoral which should be the priest's *vade mecum*: "*Necesse est ut sacerdos, mortuus omnibus passionibus, vivat vitâ divinâ.*"

"*Magna dignitas sacerdotum,*" says St. Lawrence Justinian, "*sed magnum est pondus. In alto gradu positi, oportet quoque ut in virtutum culmine sint erecti.*"

St. Thomas, the angel of the school, speaking from a theological standpoint, says: Priests should not only be virtuous but perfect in virtue. "*Perfecti in virtute esse debent.*" Desiring to be more explicit he continues: "*Ordines sacri præexigunt sanctitatem; undè pondus ordinum imponendum parietibus jam per sanctitatem desiccatis, id est, ab humore vitiorum.*" Consider well the two reasons from which he draws his conclusion. Firstly, since the priest is superior to the laity in dignity he ought to be superior to them in virtue. "*Ad idoneam executionem ordinum NON SUFFICIT BONITAS QUALISCOMQUE, SED REQUIRITUR BONITAS EXCELLENS, ut sicut illi qui ordinem suscipiunt, super plebem constituuntur gradu ordinis, ità et superiores sint merito sanctitatis.*" Secondly, since the priest receives in holy Orders the power to consecrate the body and blood of Jesus Christ, he ought to be possessed of a greater sanctity than that required in the religious state. "*QUIA PER SACRUM ORDINEM ALIQUIS DEPUTATUR AD DIGNISSIMA MINISTERIA, QUIBUS IPSI CHRISTO servitur in sacramento altaris, ad quod requiritur MAJOR SANCTITAS INTERIOR QUAM REQUIRAT ETIAM RELIGIONIS STATUS.*"

Thus it is clearly manifest that all the Fathers and Doctors of the Church are unanimous in their declarations as to what the sanctity of the priest ought to be, by reason of the sublime functions of his holy state. Their authority cannot be questioned, while their doctrine on the matter is corroborated by the highest authority on earth, the authority of God's Church. She has always urgently insisted in her Councils and Canons on the necessity of *sacerdotal sanctity*. She has never ceased to manifest her great solicitude for the sanctity of her priests, for the acquisition and preservation of which she has furnished them with rules and imposed strict obligations. The Fourth Council of

Carthage says: "*Qui sancti non sunt, sancta TRACTARE non debent.*"

"*Eam vos virtutem induite,*" says the Fourth Council of Milan, "*ut videant alii, quasi lumen aliquod, vestram sanctitatem elucere. Quæ si magna in aliis vitæ Christianæ institutis requiritur, certe in vobis, qui mysteriorum Dei ministri divinceque gratiæ dispensatores estis, major inesse debet.*"

The Holy Council of Trent says: "*Moneant Episcopi suos clericos in quocunque ordine fuerint, ut conversatione, sermone, scientiâ, Dei populo præeant, memores ejus quod scriptum est: SANCTI ESTOTE, quia ego sanctus sum*" And in order to leave no misgivings as to whether the priest is only required to avoid mortal sin, the Holy Council adds the following words: "*Levia etiam delicta, quæ in ipsis maxima essent, effugiant sacerdotes.*"

"*Decet omnino,*" says the same holy council, "*clericos in sortem Domini vocatos, vitam moresque componere, ut habitu, gestu, incessu, sermone aliisque omnibus rebus, nil nisi grave, moderatum ac religione plenum præ se ferant.*"

And again, relative to the celebration of holy mass, this council says: "*Necessarium fatemur, nullum aliud opus adeo sanctum et divinum tractari posse quàm hoc tremendum mysterium. Satis apparet omnem operam in eo esse ponendum, ut quanta maxime fieri potest, interiori cordis munditia peragatur.*"

Hence, it is evident that there is no exaggeration in all the sayings of the holy doctors and great theologians concerning the sanctity required in the priest; since they are sanctioned by the authority of the Church, expressed not only in desire by her canons and coun-

cils, but also by her acts, deeming no efforts too arduous in order to insure to her clergy a sanctity equal to their sublime vocation.

Why has she separated them from the mass of the faithful, and given them a special rule of life? It is because, seeing in them the heads of the flock of Jesus Christ, she would have their sanctity sublime like their position, and consequently superior to that of their people. Zealously laboring for their sanctification from the very beginning of their clericulture, on giving them holy tonsure, and thereby a right to dwell in her sanctuary, she demands of them a formal renunciation of the vain pleasures and foolish joys of this world, that, their hearts being free from all earthly attachment, they can truly say: "*Dominus pars haereditatis meae et calicis mei!*"

Why does she impose on them with such inflexible firmness the law of celibacy, which is the glory of the Catholic priest; and wins for him the love and esteem of all, even of the most degenerate among savage nations? Why is this law if not to remind the priest that carnal satisfactions can have no share in his spiritual life and divine vocation; that the sacrament of marriage, holy as it is, is not holy enough for him; that the corporal part of his being is in some way spiritualized, since it is the living tabernacle of Jesus Christ who cannot suffer in it even the appearance of sin?

Why has the Church commanded her clergy to wear a dress different from that of lay people? Why has she condescended to determine even its color and form? Why has she sometimes threatened to punish with canonical censure those who, without sufficient reason, appear in public without it? Why all this, if not be-

cause, this dress, unlike all others, being in some way a special sign of our sanctity, may serve as a constant monitor, pointing out to us by its color that we are dead to the world and ourselves; and by its form that we should be the constant exponents of the modesty of our Divine Master before His people? "*Modestia vestra nota sit omnibus hominibus.*" Yes, most assuredly this holy garment is, in the intentions of holy Mother Church, the ensign of the sanctity of him who wears it.

Why has she established those venerable institutions which are called seminaries, and which are sacerdotal nurseries? Why, after having founded them does she sustain and encourage them with so much zeal and solicitude, and oblige all aspirants to the holy priesthood to pass three entire years within their sacred walls? Because she considers them as the schools of Jesus Christ; and she would have them learn from the Divine Master the virtue and science which they should possess, in order to fulfill their obligations towards God and His people.

The Church does not establish seminaries for other professions such as medicine, law, and other liberal pursuits. No. The students of these branches seek and obtain a knowledge of their science in the midst of the most populous cities. Ordinary means satisfy the children of the world who aspire to nothing higher than the ordinary sanctity in life.

But when there is question of the formation of a priest the scene changes. The importance of the work calls for important means. The Church founds special houses; she gives them priests renowned for their virtue and science. Piety, recollection and regularity reign and flourish within their precincts. Here she

moulds her young levites in sacerdotal virtue and science, and disposes them to receive worthily the different orders which raise them by degrees to the holy priesthood.

Does not all this preach most eloquently the necessity of sacerdotal sanctity in the priest? Are not all those means of sanctification like so many mouths by which holy Mother Church incessantly exclaims: "Be ye holy!" "*Estote sancti!*" Be purified more and more, you who seek the honor of carrying, not only the vases of the Lord, but the Lord himself: "*Mundamini qui fertis vasa Domini?*"

O well indeed did the saints comprehend the true meaning of those sacred truths, when, appalled by the sublime grandeur of the holy priesthood, and the super-eminent holiness which it requires, they recoiled with a sacred dread before its heavy responsibility!

Among them we count men renowned for their sanctity and science; men who have been the light and honor of the Church; the Cyprians, Athanasius', Martins, Gregories, Chrysostoms, Fulgences, who, when there was question of elevating them to the holy priesthood, concealed themselves, that some other one, more worthy in their estimation, might be chosen for that dignity. How edifying it is to see an Alexander, an Anatolius, an Augustine, and many others consecrated, so to speak, in spite of themselves. "You have done me violence," exclaimed the illustrious Bishop of Hippo: "*Vis mihi facta est merito peccatorum meorum.*"

This holy fear was so great with some that they committed excesses truly prodigious. We see St. Ephrem feign insanity; an Ambrose endeavor to blacken his own reputation; an Ammonius cut off his

own ears, and threaten to cut out his tongue, should the people persist in having him raised to the priesthood. I have not found a single saint, writes Cyril of Alexandria, who has not recoiled before the heavy responsibility of the sacred ministry. "*Omnes sanctos reperio, divini ministerii ingentem veluti molem formidantes.*"

Some may suppose that those sentiments prevailed only during the early days of Christianity, when faith was as lively as morals were pure. Such, however, is not the case. For saints of every age and clime have always regarded with reverential awe the sublime dignity of the holy priesthood, on account of the great perfection it requires in those who receive it. According to the pious Abelly, St. Vincent de Paul was penetrated with such profound sentiments of esteem for the excellency and sanctity of the sacerdotal character, and the indispensable obligation, which it imposes upon those who receive it, to lead a pure, holy and angelical life, that he said of himself: "If I were not a priest, I would never consent to become one, for I am most unworthy."

If we offer no further comment on this all important subject, it is not because it is now exhausted. However, we feel that what has been already said, cannot fail to make a salutary impression upon our pious readers. We fancy that, if they are already saints, they will labor arduously to attain to a more perfect degree of sanctity; and if, unfortunately, there are some who are far from possessing the sanctity required by their sacred vocation, they will deeply deplore the past, and henceforward lead a life truly worthy of their holy profession.

Under the eye of God, and in the light of our own conscience, let us put the following questions to our-

selves :—Am I a priest according to the heart of Jesus Christ, when I toddle reluctantly and languidly over the paths of sacerdotal virtue, instead of walking generously and manfully in the accomplishment of all my priestly duties, as pointed out by the Divine Master, and which the people themselves desire to have me do?

Do I possess that genuine sacerdotal sanctity, when I am immortified, sensual, avaricious, idle, dissolute, and fond of good living? Have I attained to the degree of sanctity that my vocation calls for, when I have become so familiar with my imperfections that I no longer think of correcting them; and instead of strengthening my feeble virtues, I suffer them to grow feebler every day, without being concerned in the least for the consequence thereof?

Do I possess that communicative and sympathetic sanctity which draws whole multitudes in the way of salvation, when I suffer many sinners to precipitate themselves head-long into hell, without feeling the least remorse for their eternal loss?

“Give me ten zealous priests,” says St. Philip Neri, “and I will insure the conversion of the world.”

Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, the torrents of Thy grace upon Thy Church, especially upon Thy priests who are its pillars, that by their sanctity they may be its ornament and glory!

CHAPTER III.

RELATIVE TO SACERDOTAL SANCTITY.—WHAT HAVE WE BEEN IN THE PAST? WHAT ARE WE AT PRESENT? WHAT DO WE PROPOSE TO BE HENCEFORWARD?

IF, after having seriously meditated the preceding considerations, fervent piety, with a desire to grow in sanctity, has no place in our soul, we have indeed a manifest sign of a feeble virtue and little to be relied upon.

Since we are priests, we ought to recognize the imperative necessity of being holy priests; for to be a priest, and not to be a holy priest, is an anomaly, a formal contradiction of God's holy will, as it is especially to the priests that He addresses these words: *Sancti estote, quia ego sanctus sum.*"—"Qui.....sanctus, sanctificetur adhuc."

If the above is the true interpretation of our sentiments now, let us descend into the depths of our soul, and proceed with the examination of the three questions proposed in this chapter. To begin at the beginning, we shall go back to the days of our seminary life. How pure and serene those days have been! How many sighs and tears accompanied that confession which repaired the disorders of youth, substituted wisdom for our levity, peace for our remorse, and virtues for vices! How sweet the hours that we spent at the foot of the altar, where we so often declared our love and fidelity to Jesus! How edifying those conversations which we held with pious fellow-students, and zealous directors, whose experience and wise counsels

have been our beacon-light later on in the discharge of our sacred duties! O how those days, which glided by so rapidly, were well filled up! The love of study and spiritual exercises left none of those blanks which beget weariness and disgust.

What delicacy of conscience revealed itself in all our actions! The very appearance of evil filled us with alarm and fear. How many importunate visits we paid our director, who smilingly answered our many questions, saying: "It is nothing, my child; go in peace, and go to holy communion as usual." In a word, what a holy and edifying life was ours! What a beautiful spectacle for the eyes of God and men!

Happy days, of which, alas! there remains perhaps for many nothing but a doleful souvenir! Yes, doleful! For when man is not what he once was, and what he still ought to be in point of sanctity, the remembrance of his saintly days begets a remorse which pierces and corrodes the heart.

Let us continue our retrospective consideration, and recall to mind that day on which, after three years of retreat in our holy solitude, devoted to pious exercises and serious reflections, we received from our venerable Pontiff the heavy and responsible charge entailed by the holy priesthood. O, venerable brethren! that day was a memorable one for us; that day on which it was said of us: "*Thou art a priest forever.*" What tongue can describe the sentiments that filled our heaving breasts on the night previous to that solemn day! And when that day had come, who can describe the thrill of awe and joy that ran through our whole being, when, by the light of divine faith, we saw the wonderful transformation that we would undergo in a few hours!

And when prostrate before the Pontiff, he consecrated our hands with holy oil, and while touching the instruments of the august sacrifice, he pronounced those words: "*Accipe potestatem offerre sacrificium Deo missasque celebrare, tum pro vivis quam pro defunctis; in nomine Domini!*" And when, in concert with the bishop, we pronounced the divine words of consecration; and when he imposed his hands upon our heads, and conferred upon us the wonderful power of forgiving sins; and when he loosened the folds of our chasuble to show the plentitude of the powers with which we were invested; and when, after having obtained for himself and for his successors a most solemn promise of reverence and obedience, he pronounced the following benediction over us;—" *Benedictio Dei omnipotentis, Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti descendat super vos, ut sitis benedicti in ordine sacerdotali; et offeratis placabiles hostias pro peccatis et offensionibus populi omnipotenti Deo, cui est honor et gloria per omnia sæcula sæculorum!*" When all those ceremonies took place for us, not we alone, but also those who assisted thereat shed tears of joy, touched by a scene so manifestly divine. What would we have said if some one, by divine permission, acquainted with the secrets of the future, would say to us:—In a short time your pious fervour will cool down, and give way to tepidity and indifference; alas! perhaps to COLD indifference; that this mass, celebrated in concert with the bishop with the liveliest faith, would be followed by so many other masses celebrated, perhaps without any preparation, without fervour, without piety, and with a precipitation which justly provokes the criticism of worldlings? Could we have believed such a revelation as this?

Let us now quit the seminary, and see what has been our conduct during the first years of our sacerdotal life.

Who can describe the ardent fervor with which we said our first mass? What painstaking preparation preceded our offering up of the holy sacrifice? And if we transgressed the rules of the ceremonies, we did so, not through levity or distraction, but through excessive care, accompanied with that holy fear, justly provoked by the greatness of the act that we were performing. Yes, on that day, and for many days after, we were holy priests; then we loved Jesus tenderly, and He loved us still more tenderly; we were humble, infinitely little in our own eyes, timid and trembling at the very appearance of evil, and constantly overawed in presence of the prodigies of which we were incessantly the feeble instruments.

The celebration of the holy mysteries was not the only part of our sacred functions that filled us with a sacred awe; the tribunal of penance had its share in it. Who among us has not a vivid recollection of the first time he sat in this tribunal of mercy? How great was our zeal then for the conversion of sinners! What touching and pressing exhortations we gave those who addressed themselves to us! What anxious solicitude filled our heart when we raised our hand for the first time to give absolution!

At the debut of our sacred ministry, how ardently we desired to devote all our talents, piety, strength, time, and our whole being to insure the success of the Apostolate committed to our care! Our labors then were indeed sanctified; our meditations were well made, our spiritual examines, our spiritual readings, our visits to the Blessed Sacrament were regularly and faithfully made every day. Not a single link was found wanting in the chain of our spiritual exercises. And this fervor so sweet and consoling for ourselves was most beneficial to others. The people on seeing it mani-

festes in all our works, blessed God for having given them a pastor, a priest, so edifying and so zealous for the salvation of their souls. That fervor acted like a secret charm upon sinners. It filled good Christians with transports of piety and divine love; the whole congregation hailed with gratitude the first acts of that holy ministry, through which they hoped to obtain most precious graces.

This picture is not a vain ideal offered to feed imaginations that live on emotions; we should know that it is an exact representation of what we have seen with many and perhaps with ourselves. Who is the priest that has not felt in his heart, during the first years of his sacred ministry, a heavenly sweetness, the result of his tender piety? It is useful to compare the results with the first fruits of our sacred ministry, and see if the noon day of our priesthood is all that its aurora announced. This naturally brings us to the second question of this chapter.

How do we stand at present in point of sacerdotal sanctity?

A priest of Jesus Christ for so many years, what is my state to-day? Have I a plausible reason to believe that the life which I have led is worthy of the sacred functions which I have exercised? Have I reason to believe that my habitual manner of acting and living is pleasing to God, and that He has no reason to be dissatisfied with my services? Does my conscience, I mean a just and upright conscience, devoid of self love which obscures it, free from dissipation which smothers it, and from a foolish scrupulosity which subverts it, a conscience enlightened as it shall be at the hour of death; does this conscience tell me that I am what I ought to be, that God does not disapprove my conduct,

and that he counts me among His faithful and beloved priests?

I know some of those cherished priests of God; their praise is in every mouth. When the name of any of them is mentioned, immediately the bystanders add;—O he is a saint! I myself have said it hundreds of times in speaking of those men of God, of whose virtuous lives I am an eye witness. Now what resemblance does my life bear to their holy lives? Do I practice the same virtues that they did? Am I actuated by the same motives that governed their conduct? Can I trace out in my life that which rendered their life so meritorious? That modesty so attractive, that mildness which disarms, that charity which enflames, that self-abnegation which edifies, that disinterestedness which all men praise, that tender piety which communicates the sacred fire of divine love to the coldest hearts?

Now let us stand before the world's gaze, which, while being so blind to its own miseries, can furnish us with light that will enable us to read most accurately the status which our conduct registers. What does it say of us, or rather what do we think it says of us? Are we authorized to believe that it venerates us, and that we have not, through our fault, merited its censures? Do we think that it judges us as favorably as it judges the holy priests of whom we have spoken? Alas! should we hear it speak, we might be painfully surprised at the striking contrast it establishes between us. Moreover, in spite of our natural inclination to close our eyes to our own faults, does not an interior voice distinctly tell us, that we are very far from being the counterpart of those holy priests whom God has given to us as models?

If we wish to know ourselves thoroughly, we can

do so, by contrasting our life with that of those holy priests, truly irreproachable, and justly admired by all. When we hear them lauded for their modesty and mildness, humility and charity, do we feel that we merit a similar praise? or do we feel the sting of remorse when we remember how often and often we have been wanting in those virtues? When we hear of their alms-deeds, their works of zeal, the success of their ministry, and the inexhaustible resources of their fervent piety for God's glory and the salvation of souls, if we be found wanting in the practice of those virtues, is not their praise our reproach?

But let us look into our own heart, and there see what is going on. Do we there find the horror that we should have for sin? Do we not make our happiness consist in something else than the service of God? Have prayer and our spiritual exercises any charms for us? Are we happy when secluded from the world, when engaged in study, or in discharging the duties of the holy ministry? Do we follow a rule of life? Have we a burning zeal for the salvation of souls? Do we knowingly give any scandal? Do we give edification in all our works? Is our piety still growing, or is it on the wane? And our fervor, formerly so edifying, is it not almost extinguished to-day?

If, unfortunately, such is the case, let us honestly and candidly acknowledge it. We are not what we ought to be. We have ignobly receded from our record of the past. We must necessarily reform our conduct, or prove a total failure in the acquiring of that sanctity which renders the priest what he ought to be.

What do we wish to be henceforward? This is indeed a very grave question. While perusing the

foregoing pages, some of our readers may draw inferences not altogether free from exaggeration. It is true, they will say, the happy days of our seminary life are passed, and the first years of our sacerdotal life were naturally characterized by that lively fervor which the discharge of our sublime functions evoked. But poor humanity is not omnipotent, and we should not press it beyond its strength. It soon grows familiar, even with the greatest prodigies, when they frequently come under its notice. Hence, we need not be surprised to see that reverential awe, which it once felt during the celebration of our august mysteries, soon disappear through frequency of contact with them.

It cannot be denied that this objection is well founded; while it would be exaggeration to maintain that the vivacity of sensible piety, and profound emotions felt on discharging our sacred duties for the first time, should not diminish in the course of years.

No, that cannot be; all agree that this sensible fervor, born of humanity, must eventually diminish; but what is real and solid fervor must remain and constitute the substance, the basis of our sacerdotal obligations. We are too often mistaken in this matter, yielding too readily to whatever flatters self-love, and lightens the weight of our duties. We often-times confound vacillating sensibility with true reality; and under the specious pretext that the lively fervor, experienced during the first years of our sacerdotal life, cannot always last—being stimulated by novelty, must disappear as time goes on—we indulgently condone our many faults, which grow worse day after day, mistaking a true, a real relaxation for a decrease in sensible fervor. The worst feature in this misconception is the fact, that we make little or no effort to discern its true cause.

We cannot do too much to steer wide of this rock, upon which many have been wrecked. If we would not share their fate, we must study seriously what we are to do. An illustration will place the question in a clearer light.

Behold a young man who bids adieu to the seminary, in which he has passed the three or four best years of his life. Every day marked his progress in piety, fervor and perfection. He received holy orders with the best dispositions; behold him a priest.

When he exercises the sacred functions of the holy ministry, he experiences in a high degree the reverential awe of which we have spoken above. His fervor is such that he seems to be deluged with heavenly sweetness and consolation. He stops at no sacrifice to advance in spiritual perfection, to which he aspires with an ardor that never flags. Heaven and earth admire and praise his generous efforts to live and die a saint.

Nevertheless, a veteran of the sacerdotal ranks, a prophet of evil, who, perhaps, alas! knows only too well by his own experience the secret of the future, turns away saying to himself: *Seminary fervor! young priest's fervor!*

In fact only a few weeks or a few months have glided by and already the gold is rusted, already the sun's disk is obscured. The blur, it is true, is only a slight haze as yet; it is sufficient, however, to dim the brightness so pure and vivid of the first rays, and fore-shadows a deeper obscurity at a time not far distant. To be more explicit, the soul grows lax, the heart becomes cold, the will wanes in suppleness and energy. Poor young priest, whither are you drifting? Your

course was so promising, yet so brief! Whence those obstacles thrown in his way? "*Currebas benè, quis te impedivit?*"

Let him examine his actions, and the drift thereof will give him his answer. Are his meditations as long, preceded by the same preparation, prosecuted with the same close attention as they were the week before his ordination? Does he make his examination of conscience with the same exact regularity, and the same pious dispositions as he was wont to do while in the seminary? Does he make his spiritual reading regularly and well? Does he recite his breviary as he did in the days of fervor? Are not the people, who were fatigued by the length of time he took, through devotion, to say holy mass, now surprised, almost scandalized by the rapidity with which he hurries through it? Does he still possess that delicacy of conscience which he had in those days of fervor? In a word, is his general conduct as satisfactory as it was, and as it promised to be in the future?

If he is obliged to answer all those questions in a manner detrimental to his sacred calling, will he pretend to lay the blame to the cooling of sensible fervor, instead of to the true cause, viz: diminished piety, enfeebled virtue and recreancy to duty? Are not these the factors that go to constitute that cloud which grows darker and lower every day, and whose thunderbolts now heard in the distance, threaten to burst over his head in the near future?

Having dwelt sufficiently upon this point let us now take up the last article of our interrogatory. What do we propose to be henceforward?

Let us not deceive ourselves, venerable brethren;

we ought to anticipate, as much as possible, the irrevocable judgment that God will soon pronounce upon each one of us. In every instant of our life we are advancing toward that terrible tribunal, from which this judgment shall be rendered. Let us stand face to face with that future, upon which we always count for a spiritual reform that usually never takes place. Let us put to ourselves the following question, which has been productive of such good results for so many priests: What do I wish to be henceforward? Do I wish to remain such as I am? Would I wish to die with my feeble and imperfect virtues, with my daily infidelities to my spiritual and sacerdotal duties? Is it my desire to lead such a life, and do nothing to improve it? The priest, who asks himself those questions, and is led thereby to discover in himself faults which he never thought of, will unhesitatingly say: No, I will not remain in this state, I do not wish to lead a life displeasing to God and noxious to myself, I do not wish to appear before His tribunal with my pride, vivacity and supineness, and a multitude of other defects which I uselessly tell my confessor week after week. I repeat it. I shall not remain in this state. I must change and change for the better.

How strange! that we should spend our life in deceiving ourselves! that we should be blind to realities that are self-evident! For instance, we think that when we say we will, all is accomplished; while we simply express a wish born of words never to exist in act; which places us in the category of those who are killed by their desires.

This is not the manner in which worldlings *will* for the frivolties which they covet. When the miser says: "I wish to become rich," does he fold his arms and wait for the happy chance that will put him in pos-

session of the coveted prize? When the soldier says: I wish to achieve glory and renown, does he sluggishly lie in his tent while his companions march into the field of battle? Does the pleasure-seeking libertine rest satisfied with wishing for the things he loves? Alas! he exhausts all his energies to secure them.

How different with the Christian and sometimes the priest? They say: I wish to change my life, I wish to acquire the sanctity required by my state of life. I wish to remove from my soul everything displeasing to God, and plant therein solid virtue. I wish all this, but not at the cost of pain or sacrifice. I wish to obtain it without renouncing whatever is pleasing to me, without being obliged to practice what I dislike to do. This wish is only a desire, and one of those which kill the soul that gives them birth.

The will which St. Thomas requires of the Christian is very different. The saint being asked by his sister what is required in order to acquire spiritual perfection, replied that one thing was necessary, and one thing only—the WILL to will it. This is very true and strictly exact; for notwithstanding the fact that God's grace is necessary to man's will in order to acquire sanctity, yet, that grace will avail him only in proportion to the intensity with which he wills his spiritual perfection. This is the will of which St. Thomas speaks, when he says, that to become a saint it suffices to will it.

Now let us ask ourselves seriously this question: Do I wish to become a saint? Do I will it sincerely, seriously, strongly, constantly, efficaciously, and from my very soul? Yes, I will it without doubt. This would be our answer. But we have reason now to be-

ware; has not this been our answer for many years past? Have we not repeated it hundreds of times in our meditations, our spiritual examines, and especially in our confessions? What has been the result of all those fair promises made in the sanctuary of our heart and conscience? Are our imperfections corrected? Are those virtues demanded by our state of life acquired? This is asking too much perhaps. Let us ask less. Are our failings diminished? Let us ask still less, have we really and seriously attacked them?

Alas! There are some, perhaps, whose reply to all those questions will consist in bowing the head in confusion. They will strike their breast in token of their repentance. They will resolve to utilize that *future* upon which they now found their new hopes of success!

Be it far from us to weaken in the least that confidence which our readers put in the *future* for reform; we claim, however, the liberty to remind them, that the future, upon which they have counted thus far, has not secured them the spiritual riches which they hoped to obtain. The present which they now possess, and which will be of the past to-morrow, was a portion of that fair future upon which they had counted so much, when they made those good promises to God, and again repeated to-day. When that future became the present, what has it done towards increasing the sanctity of the priesthood? Where are those happy reforms which we hoped to see it bring? And what guarantee have we now that the future, which we hail to-day with the sweet beams of hope, will put us in possession of that boon which that future—now the past—has not done? Have we not good reason to fear that our fair promises to-day may prove to be identically the same in principle and results? Have we not good reason to believe that by sowing the wind we

shall reap the whirlwind? "*Ventum seminabunt, et turbinem metent!*"

To corroborate what has been said, and to inculcate the practice of the truths which we have set forth, we must set out in relief a reflection, which the study of the times must suggest to every attentive observer.

It very seldom happens that a luke-warm Christian quits his infidelities, corrects his faults, or at least, stems the tide of their progress, and labors generously and perseveringly at the work of his perfection. This is unquestionably true of all classes, our own not excepted. Do priests, generally speaking, correct their faults and advance in perfection after they leave the seminary, and, as years roll on, become sanctified in the holy ministry? Such, indeed, ought to be the case. But is it really so? We know that life is passing rapidly, and death will very soon hand us over to the Eternal Judge. We know that we are the recipients of many and signal graces—graces of favor and predilection, sacerdotal graces. We are privileged to offer up the holy sacrifice of the Mass, and receive into our heart and soul every day the body and blood of Christ. For these and many other well-known reasons, we ought to advance in sanctity as we advance in years. But once more we ask, is it so? Alas! we are unfortunately obliged to say with the pious author of the imitation: "*Si omni anno unum vitium extirparemus, cito viri perfecti efficeremur. Sed modo e contrario sæpè sentimus ut meliores et puriores in initio conversionis nostræ nos fuisse inveniamus, quam post multos annos professionis. Fervor et profectus noster quotidie deberet crescere; sed nunc pro magno videtur si quis primi fervoris partem posset retinere.*"

To continue the course of our observations, what is

the ordinary conduct of the priest as he advances in the sacerdotal life? There is no question here of those priests—fortunately few—who are the scandal and reproach of the holy priesthood, an evil which God seems to permit from time to time to inspire us with a salutary fear and diffidence in our own strength, and to show to the world that our holy religion is truly divine. No, those unfortunate wanderers have no part in the present consideration.

The priests, whose conduct is now the subject of consideration, are those members of the clergy, who are honorable indeed in many respects, but commit a multitude of minor faults, which they sincerely regret, but have not the courage to correct. Of those, we ask if it is a common occurrence to them to correct themselves, and advance in virtue, according to the precept of the holy Council of Trent: "*Levia etiam delicta, quæ in ipsis maxima essent, effugiant sacerdotes?*" Alas! a sad experience proves that the spiritual reformation of those priests, deferred from day to day, seldom or never takes place.

The root of this evil may be sometimes traced to their seminary life. There are very few priests—if any—who, on quitting this holy place, do not leave with the conviction that they have buried forever their defects. Unfortunately such is not the case: for those defects, concealed beneath the varnish of a superficial piety, only await the occasion to reappear, and soon give birth to great imperfections. During their sojourn in the seminary, they moved irresistibly in the ways of piety. The absence of danger, the regularity of life, and constant occupation; the counsel and vigilance of superiors, the frequent reception of the sacraments, the good example of a multitude of pious fellow-students—all this favored the practice of virtues and

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rendered defects less perceptible. However, the experienced eye of the directors detected, beneath this specious appearance, a germ of certain defects, which, if not eradicated, would eventually develop in the course of years. Enlightened by experience, they could have foretold to a certainty, that such a one would be proud; that another would be dissipated and idle, given to anger, and slothful in the service of God.

And, in fact, what is the lesson that time brings? The impressions made by the preparatory retreats for the reception of holy orders, and the imposing ceremonies of their ordination, together with the first acts of the holy ministry, are soon forgotten. Their first fervor cools and disappears. The burnished defects concealed and not eradicated reappear, and the sinister prediction of the directors is too nearly realized.

After a few oscillations between fervent, regular piety, and slothful, inconsistent piety, after a few struggles between the new and the old man—between the true conscience, which threatens and warns, and the false conscience, which palliates and assures—they gradually drift into a dangerous state, in which, after a time, they become permanently fixed, having persuaded themselves that they are perfectly secure.

They have a great horror for mortal sin; they propose to exercise honorably the duties of the sacred ministry, and faithfully discharge the essential obligations of the holy priesthood; while they live on peacefully in the midst of their imperfections and daily infidelities. They discard the true conscience, which warns, and they listen to the false one, which flatters and deceives. The voice of the new man is reduced to silence, while that of the old man is hailed with confidence.

They enshrine their life in their defects, which dwell in their hearts like importunate hosts, which they consider less painful to suffer than to expel. Here they breed dissipation, levity, raillery, vivacity, susceptibility, idleness, immortification, negligence and tepidity in the service of God. They possess a zeal that scarcely merits the name, and which is chiefly sustained by ordinary works, and is never found in those great enterprises and pious industries, so well known to the holy priest. Of course they do not say that they are holy priests; but they do say that they can save their souls without doing more. But when the last hour comes, when men see things in their true light, without disguise, their peace proves to be what their lives were—false; and now it recedes to give place to trouble and regret. Behold the state of priests here in question, as far as we are able to express it! priests who rarely correct their defects, who seldom or never fortify their virtues, who labor not to acquire sacerdotal sanctity, the necessity of which St. Thomas energetically points out, when he says that “priests should be not only virtuous, but perfect in virtue;” adding that “theirs should be an excellent piety, a piety more perfect than that required for the religious state.”

Let us appeal to experience once more. Where are those priests who were known to have such and such defects the first or second year of their sacerdotal life? Have they, by repeated efforts, succeeded in removing them? If to-day we find them the slaves of levity, dissipation, idleness, and raillery, devoid of taste or love for piety, shall we find them, after the lapse of ten years, grave, recollected, studious, charitable, and full of fervor for their spiritual exercises? Consider what is daily transpiring around us, and see if we are often edified by such reforms? O that these reflections

may sink deeply in our hearts, and fill us with a salutary dread for the reforms that we expect from a future, which for some may never come, and for others will be very short! "*Cum metu et tremore vestram salutem operamini.*" O Future! subject of fatal illusions! true image of the deceitful mirage, which leads the unwary traveller into abysses which it conceals from his view!

Dearest brethren, be not victims of this fatal siren! Remember that each day, passed without a combat, fortifies our defects and weakens our virtue; while by our resistance to God's appeals, we diminish the number of graces which He would grant us, and we enervate our will. We should bear in mind that later on, we will be unable to accomplish with limited graces and an enervated will, what we have not the courage to do now under more favorable circumstances. Remember that the priest's zeal is in perfect keeping with his sanctity, and that, consequently, the salvation of many souls may depend on the perfection which we defer from day to day.

In conclusion, we should never count on the morrow to reform. This very day, just now, is the time to begin. "*Dixi, nunc cepi.*" A writer, dolefully celebrated, spoke truly when he said: "It is time enough, you say, to begin to-morrow. FOLLY! This time, which you abuse, digs your grave, and TO-MORROW brings ETERNITY!"



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